

ARTICLE/СТАТЬЯ

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*BUKHARIN AND THE “RED PINKERTON”**

As one of the more curious yet characteristic cultural phenomena of the NEP period, the “red Pinkerton” movement – which sought to graft “orthodox” Marxist content onto the patently bourgeois form of Western-styled detective serials – has received its share of critical attention.¹ It has yet, however, to be properly contextualized in the cultural politics of the NEP, whose chief architect and defender, Nikolai Bukharin, is credited with summoning the “red Pinkerton” into existence. Bukharin’s earliest statements (the first of which has hitherto escaped notice) calling for the creation of a “communist Pinkerton” demonstrate an acute anxiety about the regime’s inability to enthuse and inspire young communists. By the mid-1920s, Soviet leaders and cultural arbiters feared that young people were in the grips of “NEP fatigue” and had been led astray by *Esen-inshchina*, a decadent cult built around the work and image of the “hooligan” poet Sergei Esenin. Bukharin sought to head this danger off, proposing Soviet thrillers that would make use of time-tested formulae for capti-

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1. See, for instance, A. F. Britikov, “Detektivnaia povest’ v kontekste prikliuchencheskikh zhanrov,” *Russkaia sovetskaia povest’ 20-30kh gg*, ed. V. A. Kovalev (Leningrad: Nauka, 1976), pp. 408-53; M. E. Malikova, “‘Kommunisticheskii Pinkerton’: ‘sotsial’nyi zakaz’ nepa,” *Vestnik istorii, literatury, iskusstva*, 2 vols. (Moskva: Sobranie, 2005), 2: 278-91; D. D. Nikolaev, *Russkaia proza 1920-1930-kh godov: avantiurnaia, fantasticheskaia i istoricheskaia proza*, ed. O. N. Mikhailov (Moscow: Nauka, 2006), pp. 122-92; Carol Avins, *Border Crossings: The West and Russian Identity in Soviet Literature, 1917-1934* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), ch. 4; Jeffrey Brooks, “The Moral Self in Russia’s Literary and Visual Cultures: The Late Imperial Era and Beyond,” in *The Space of the Book: Print Culture in the Russian Social Imagination*, ed. Miranda Remnek (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 218-23; and Robert Russell, “Red Pinkertonism: An Aspect of Soviet Literature of the 1920s,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 60, no. 3 (1982): 390-412.

vating young readers. Like the NEP itself, however, the “red Pinkerton” was doomed to meet with political failure. The genre’s most vehement critics, advocates of Party-sponsored proletarian hegemony in culture, refused to accept the hybrid genre as anything other than a vehicle for bourgeois infiltration. A proper dating of Bukharin’s calls helps to place “red Pinkertonism” in its historical and political context. Bukharin’s positions on the “red Pinkerton,” the *Proletkult*, and militant proletarian literary groups, along with the *Eseninshchina* illuminate the consistency of his cultural stance and his attempts to strike compromises where few could be struck.

A. G. Löwy describes Bukharin as a “fanatical reader of detective stories, who arrived late at important party meetings because he could not drag himself away from a thriller he was currently reading.”² This captivating “thriller” might have been a “red Pinkerton,” Bukharin’s own proposed counteragent to the manifestly bourgeois mode of entertainment – with its capitalist freelancers cast as urban *bogatyr*s – that had become the true “people’s literature” of the pre- and immediate post-revolutionary period in Russia. But the thrillers may also have been the ideologically poisonous Western(ized) fictions themselves. Löwy’s description of Bukharin points to a persistent ambiguity: Soviet critics had much trouble distinguishing between “red Pinkertons” and their bourgeois inspirations – and with good reason. There is no doubt that “red Pinkertons” owed their popularity to the wild success of the previous incarnation of the detective story and other formulaic popular genres that backgrounded their reception.

In denouncing *Pinkertonovshchina* as an ideological threat, Soviet policy makers followed in the tracks of pre-revolutionary leftist critics. Bukharin suggested that Soviet writers create their own brand of detective fiction. The “red Pinkertons” that Bukharin now proposed first had to meet a well-defined horizon of generic expectations shaped by pre-revolutionary detective stories. Reversing the genre’s ideological content would be easy enough, but tinkering with its structure would defeat the enterprise. As George Dove, adapting Gadamer, Jauss, and Iser, puts it:

The “differentness” of detective fiction is structural, and its deep structure, like that of organized play, is shaped by convention. As a

2. Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), pp. 136-37, citing Adolf Georg Löwy, *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht. Bucharin: Vision des Kommunismus* (Wien, Frankfurt, Zürich: Europa Verlag, 1969), p. 124.

result, the detection genre is generous toward the introduction of new themes but conservative with respect to the conventions of structure.³

It should be noted that the question of the Soviet *Pinkertonovshchina*'s genre is far from settled. As many scholars have pointed out, the "red Pinkerton" label encompassed a wide variety of works that drew on myriad generic models; in the broadest sense, they were a brand of adventure literature.⁴ In practice, most "red Pinkerton" authors wedded several strands of pre-revolutionary popular literature: detective serials (Pinkerton, Carter, Doyle, Rocambole, Lupin), the *kinoroman*, classic adventure stories (H. Rider Haggard, Mayne Reid, R. L. Stevenson, etc.), melodramatic romance (Anastasiia Verbitskaia), espionage (Nikolai Breshko-Breshkovskii), and science fiction (Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, etc.). With conventional literary and generic standards thrown into bewildering confusion by the Revolution and its concomitant ideological and cultural reevaluations, the authors of early Soviet adventure fiction for children and young adults operated in almost complete chaos, poaching the conventional preserves of well-established popular literary traditions. Reviewers of the period pointed to this hybridity, and none too favorably.⁵ In addition, these authors often justified their reliance on pre-revolutionary formulae by claiming to parody them; some of the more sophisticated practitioners – like Marietta Shaginian, Vsevolod Ivanov, and Viktor Shklovskii, who were members or associates of the Serapion Brotherhood – may have regarded parody as serious Formalist business, but it lent their work an ambiguous tone and further complicated their reception.⁶ Strictly speaking, "red Pinkertons" might no longer have been

3. George N. Dove, *The Reader and the Detective Story* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State Univ. Popular Press, 1997), p. 41.

4. See, for instance, Britikov, "Detektivnaia povest'," pp. 428-38 *passim*; Malikova, "Kommunisticheskii Pinkerton," pp. 284-88; Nikolaev, *Russkaia proza 1920-1930-kh godov*, pp. 92-193 *passim*; and Russell, "Red Pinkertonism," pp. 392-94, 401.

5. See, for instance, Viktor Kin, review of Andrei Irkutov's and Vladimir Verevkin's *A.A.A.E.* (Moscow: Mospoligraf, 1924), *Knigonosha*, no. 4 (1925): 21, and Valerian Pravdukhin, review of *A.A.A.E.* and Lev Nikulin's *Taina seifa* (Leningrad: Puchina, 1925), *Krasnaia nov'* 4 (May 1925): 291-92. To complicate matters further, the "red Pinkerton" label was often affixed from outside to works that were not expressly advertised as examples of the genre, as in the case of Nikulin's *Taina seifa*. This fact served to broaden the horizon of generic expectations, and testified to the fact that reviewers often used *Pinkertonovshchina* and "red Pinkerton" as crude cudgels, rather than targeted instruments.

6. See, for instance, Britikov, "Detektivnaia povest'," p. 427; idem, *Russkii sovetskii nauchno-fantasticheskii roman* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1970), pp. 77-78; idem, "Detektivnyi zhanr," in *Tvorchestvo Marietty Shaginian*, ed. V. A. Kovalev (Leningrad: Gos. izd-vo khudozh. lit-ry, 1980), pp. 104-06; Samuel D. Cioran, introduction to Marietta Shaginian, *Mess-Mend, or Yankees in Petrograd*, trans. Samuel Cioran (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis,

“Pinkertons” proper, but the detective story continued to serve as one of the genre’s primary models, albeit a detective story of a certain type.⁷

The work most firmly associated with the “red Pinkerton” phenomenon to this day – Marietta Shaginian’s *“Mess-Mend,” ili Ianki v Petrograde* [“Mess-Mend,” or Yankees in Petrograd] (1923-1925) – bears out the direct link between pre-revolutionary and Soviet *Pinkertonovshchina*. Not only is Shaginian’s hero, Mick Thingsmaster, a clear inheritor of Nick Carter and Nat Pinkerton’s mantels, the author herself pointed to her Pinkertonian models.⁸ Indeed, although Shaginian’s was not the first “red Pinkerton,” her affiliation with “red Pinkertonism” has become so fixed in the minds of general readers and critics that, until relatively recently, her reminiscences have served as the primary source on the genre’s rise and Bukharin’s role in it. For instance, Robert Russell, Carol Avins, and Katerina Clark all state that Bukharin’s *Pravda* article in which he first made his call for the creation of a “red Pinkerton” appeared in 1923; in doing so, they follow a claim Shaginian makes in her 1926 and 1956 self-mythologizing addenda to *“Mess-Mend.”*⁹ Avins then notes that “[t]his article, mentioned in many sources, does not appear to be included in the most comprehensive bibliography of Bukharin’s writings.”¹⁰ M. E. Malikova reveals that Bukharin might have advanced his idea two years earli-

1991), pp. 16-17; Katerina Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), p. 179; Boris Dralyuk, “*Pinkertonovshchina*, 1907-1934: The Cultural Reception of ‘Western’ Detective Serials in Pre-Revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2011), chs. 6 and 7; Nikolaev, *Russkaia proza 1920-1930-kh godov*, pp. 148-52; Russell, “Red Pinkertonism,” p. 399; and Régine Robin, “Popular Literature of the 1920s: Russian Peasants as Readers,” in *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 259-60.

7. See Dralyuk, “*Pinkertonovshchina*, 1907-1934,” chs. 2 and 8. In order to provide a clearer definition of the Russian “Pinkerton” genre and to explain the discrepancy between these serials and the classic detective story, I adopt Gary Hoppenstand’s concept of the Avenger Detective. See Gary Hoppenstand, “Introduction: The Missing Detective,” in *The Dime Novel Detective*, ed. idem (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1982), p. 4, and idem, *In Search of the Paper Tiger: A Sociological Perspective of Myth, Formula, and the Mystery Genre in the Entertainment Print Mass Medium* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State Univ. Popular Press, 1987), pp. 122-23.

8. See, for instance, Marietta Shaginian, *Kak ia pisala Mess-Mend* (Moscow: Kinopechat’, 1926), *passim*, and idem, *Chelovek i vremia* (1975), in *Sobranie sochinenii v devyati tomakh* (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo khudozh. lit-ry, 1971-1975), 1: 401-02.

9. Avins, *Border Crossings*, p. 55; Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, p. 173; Russell, “Red Pinkertonism,” p. 392; Shaginian, *Kak ia pisala Mess-Mend*, p. 5; and idem, “Predislavie avtora (1956),” in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2: 233.

10. Avins, *Border Crossings*, p. 55, referring to Sidney Heitman’s *Nikolai I. Bukharin: A Bibliography* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1969).

er, and characterizes his call as a “social order/commission [*zakaz*]” rather than an “order/command [*prikaz*]” – an appropriate distinction between the method of NEP’s chief theoretician and that of Stalin.¹¹

But Marietta Shaginian’s incorrect dating deserves closer attention. It appears she repeatedly postdates Bukharin’s article in order to exaggerate the speed with which she “answered this call [*otvetila na etot prizyv*].”¹² If the “red Pinkertons” made use of fashionably “fast-paced, entertaining plots [as] markers of the Jazz Age [and] of revolution *a fortiori*,”¹³ then why should the narrative of literary production not itself be speeded up? Shaginian casts herself as a kind of literary shock-worker. This heroic, individualistic gesture belies her commitment to the collectivist ideal – but the original formulation of her myth hints at an even profounder anxiety:

The best books are those written for oneself. Writing to order [*na zakaz*] is the same as suckling someone else’s child: one gives oneself, but doesn’t propagate oneself. In the autumn of 1923 I was lucky enough to write a book for my personal pleasure, without any thought that it might ever be printed.

There is a saying: “[another’s] laurels won’t let you sleep.” We remade it in the era of War Communism: bay-leaf [i.e., laurel] soup won’t let you sleep. Every month we were given cod and a bay leaf, a match and a bay leaf, cranberries and a bay leaf. Stores of bay leaves lay on the shelf, and when the rations had ceased but the publishers hadn’t yet started up, soup was often seasoned with bay leaves alone.

On the day of which I write, we had bay-leaf soup. Under the plate lay a newspaper. Our eyes – like chicken beaks – peck each printed word, wherever it’s found. Removing the plate, I noticed Bukharin’s tempting [*zamanchivyi*] feuilleton announcing that “it wouldn’t be so bad [*nedurno by bylo*] for us to create a red Pinkerton” and pecked it up from its first to its final word.¹⁴

As if polemicizing with Malikova’s assertion seventy years hence, Shaginian vehemently rejects the accusation that her novel was written “to order [*na zakaz*].” Furthermore, whereas her 1956 introduction at least acknowledges that “*Mess-Mend*” “answered [Bukharin’s] call,” the 1926 pamphlet boldly claims that the politician’s “tempting feuilleton” simply

11. Malikova, “Kommunisticheskii Pinkerton,” p. 278.

12. Shaginian, “Predislovie avtora (1956),” p. 233.

13. Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, p. 173.

14. Shaginian, *Kak ia pisala Mess-Mend*, p. 5

coincided with the author's "personal pleasure." But Shaginian's myth of the origin of the "red Pinkerton" contradicts itself. The "era of War Communism" ended before the autumn of 1923, and rationing was on its way out in 1922.

And what can we make of Shaginian's bitterly ironic transubstantiation of symbolic "laurels [*lavry*]" into a rationed "bay leaf [*lavrovyi list*]"? Although the jab is ostensibly aimed at the defunct "era of War Communism," it also seems to mock the "materialist muse" which would come to dominate Soviet art by the beginning of the next decade. At the very least, these self-assertive and satirical passages give us some sense of the trouble to come. Whatever Shaginian's chronological misdirection indicates, this most famous of "red Pinkerton" scribes' account has obscured the history of the genre's and of Bukharin's "call."

Although Malikova does not quote from Bukharin's first editorial calling for "red Pinkertons," which appeared in 1921, she reproduces a portion of its 1922 follow-up – a speech Bukharin delivered at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of the Russian Communist Union of Youth (Komsomol) and reprinted in *Pravda* on October 14th.¹⁵ Here, Bukharin appeals both to Marx's own reputed taste for crime fiction and, consequently, to the "laws of individual psychology," which *require* a particular kind of satisfaction:

About a year and a half ago I had the opportunity to suggest the creation of a communist Pinkerton, and today I hold the same point of view. I maintain that the bourgeoisie, precisely because it isn't foolish, offers Pinkerton to the young. Pinkerton enjoys tremendous success. Marx, as is generally known, read crime novels with great enthusiasm. What's the point here? The point is that the mind requires a light, entertaining, interesting plot [*fabula*] and unfolding of events – and the young, ten times more so than adults.¹⁶

This passage clearly echoes certain pre-revolutionary leftist discussions of *Pinkertonovshchina*.¹⁷ It bears particular resemblance to Viktor N. Soroka-Rosinskii's "Nat Pinkerton and Children's Literature" (1910), which also calls for a book that "meets the students' demands, rather than imposing adults' tastes upon them" – a book that will make students "fall

15. Malikova, "Kommunisticheskii Pinkerton," p. 279.

16. Nikolai Bukharin, "Kommunisticheskoe vospitanie molodezhi v usloviakh Nep'a," *Pravda*, Oct. 14, 1922, p. 2 [orig. delivered to the Fifth All-Russian RKSM Conference].

17. See Dralyuk, "'As Many Street Cops as Corners': Displacing 1905 in the Pinkertons," *Russian History* 38, no. 2 (2011): 159-74.

in love with and take close to heart those who fought for truth and justice [*tekhn, kto borolsia za istinu i spravedlivost'*].”¹⁸ But to appreciate just how thoroughly Bukharin’s thinking mirrors that of pre-revolutionary leftist pedagogues, one must examine his original editorial (or another more detailed pronouncement).

A little less than a year prior to the 1922 speech, on November 25, 1921, *Pravda* ran a Bukharin editorial titled “The Growing Reserves and Communist Education” [“Podrastaiushchie rezervy i kommunisticheskoe vospitanie”], which stressed the importance of approaching young people on their own terms and paying special attention to their psychological demands:

“Adult” comrades sometimes find it extremely difficult to understand the peculiarities of young people. Too often, they measure these things “by their own standard [*na svoi arshin*].” [. . .] Old norms are torn apart, splitting across all seams. The virtue of *Domostroi* and *Youth’s Honest Mirror* is dead, and it would be absurd to resurrect it. We need a new orientation, based on what Marxism gives us. [. . .] We often fail to understand that young people mustn’t go without nourishment [*zasushivat'*]. Take a look, however, at the literature they are given. These works, for the most part, are instructions with paragraphs, directives, instructional language, and other specialized features. [. . .] Even an adult fed with instructions alone will soon refuse to serve. And the young people require a much larger degree of emotional impact. [. . .] Meanwhile, let us remember how the bourgeoisie operated. It had captivating [*uvlekatel'nye*] novels, short stories, even special “street” editions, such as the adventures of Nat Pinkerton and others. Some will say: “You’ve talked yourself *ad absurdum*!” Not at all. All this literature was often dirty [*chasto byvala griaznoi*]. But it affected feelings, was read, and cultivated [*obrabatyvala*] young people in the spirit of detective Romanticism and the protection of the bourgeois order [*okhrany gospodstva burzhuaizii*]. The bourgeoisie knew how to cultivate the young, using various kinds of weapons. [. . .] But we have nothing that broadly involves the whole psychology of youth [*shirokogo obvolakivaniia vsei iunosheskoi psikhologii u nas net*].¹⁹

18. N. V. Soroka-Rosinskii, “Nat Pinkerton i detskaia literatura,” in *Pedagogicheskie sochineniia*, ed. A. T. Gubko, (Moscow: Pedagogika, 1991), p. 64 [orig. published in *Russkaia shkola* 1 (1910)].

19. Bukharin, “Podrastaiushchie rezervy i kommunisticheskoe vospitanie,” *Pravda*, Nov. 25, 1921, p. 2.

Within a year, Bukharin's notion of "involving/enveloping [*obvolakivanie*]" youth psychology with the help of Pinkerton-like narratives became a pedagogical directive. By the opening of the Fifth Komsomol Congress in 1922, at which Bukharin raised the issue anew, the very formulation was fixed as a "Bukharinian catchword" in the minds of those most concerned with winning young people over to the Party's causes.²⁰ In many ways, Bukharin's earlier 1921 editorial reflected a sea change in Bolshevik policy – a move away from the militaristic austerity characteristic of the Civil War period:

We have forgotten the need to develop youth's feelings, and approach it as simply an intellectual mechanism [*golovnaia mashinka*]. We won't be able to captivate [*zakhvatit'*] wide circles of youth with these methods. I find certain colleagues' desire to educate the youth in some pious [*postnyi*], ascetic spirit particularly monstrous [*chudovishchno*]. For example, some strive to forbid dancing, to banish every joy and merriment. Of course, that sermon in favor of premature old age has nothing to do with the Marxist worldview. We simply need to ensure that everything is done in proper proportion; we need tact in this respect, rather than a sermon in favor of the Middle Ages in 1921.²¹

The dates and occasions of Bukharin's two statements shed light on the context of his call to engage young people. His 1921 editorial appeared just as the nation began its slow crawl out of the devastation of Civil War. 1920-21 marked the low point in Soviet economic health and the regime's ideological effectiveness. The total number of books published in 1921 had dipped to 308, and only a minuscule fraction of these were "*belles lettres*."²² Even after the official debut of NEP and the August 1921 decree to allow private publishing firms, only one percent of books published in 1922 were for children.²³ In arguing for "tactfully" engaging literature for the young in November 1921, Bukharin acknowledged one of the more glaring oversights of Bolshevik cultural activity,

20. Mark Solomonovich Zorkii (Munni), "Knigu raboche-krest'ianskoi molodezhi!," *Pravda*, Oct. 12, 1922, p. 1.

21. Bukharin, "Podrastaiushchie rezervy," p. 2.

22. Brooks, "The Breakdown in Production and Distribution of Printed Material, 1917-1927," in *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*, eds. Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985), p. 169.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

securing ideological support for the regime and the unorthodox New Economic Policy among the "growing reserves."

It is also notable that Bukharin chose to reiterate his commitment to Pinkerton-like narratives at the Communist Youth conference the following October, and that, judging by Komsomol leaders' own speeches and editorials, his notion had taken root in that organization. This fact confirms that *Pinkertonovshchina* was still, and would for some time continue to be, perceived as predominantly an issue affecting the young. Secondly, the Komsomol was an ideal venue for the NEP architect's cultural experimentation. As Peter Kenez points out, although "[o]nly the most naïve would suggest that the Komsomol was from the moment of its inception [on October 29, 1918] anything other than an instrument in the hands of the Party," its early Congresses were not devoid of "spirited debate."²⁴ Anne E. Gorsuch has taken this suggestion even further. She concludes that

[d]uring NEP, at least, Komsomol culture (like Soviet society) blended new ways of life with old ones, and officially approved activities with barely tolerated ones. The Komsomol was an organization for youth, through which the party tried to remake them into Bolshevik images of the ideal young communist. It was an organization of youth, in which some young people identified with official communist culture while others defended alternative expressions of what it meant to be communist. It was a site of agreement, negotiation, and resistance between and within generations about what a communist should be and how best to make one.²⁵

At the Fifth Congress, in fact, the Komsomol showed signs of serious trouble. The organization had from the start represented only a small portion (one or two percent) of the nation's eligible youth, but this statistic was by no means unexpected for a vanguard clique.²⁶ By October 1922, the membership had dropped to 250,000; the organization had shrunk by half in the two years following the Civil War.²⁷ Many of the Fifth Con-

24. Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 93, 92.

25. Anne E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000), p. 42.

26. Kenez, *Birth of the Propaganda State*, p. 94.

27. *Shestoi s"ezd Rossiiskogo leninskogo kommunisticheskogo soiuz molodezhi. Stenografizheskii otchet, 12-18 iulia 1924 g.* (Moscow-Leningrad: Molodaia gvardiia, 1924), pp. 135, 122. The figure given at the Sixth Congress is generally regarded as more reliable than the inflated 325,000 reported at the Fifth Congress [*Piatyi vserossiiskii s"ezd*

gress's most prominent speakers, including Commissar of Enlightenment (Education) Anatolii Lunacharskii, attributed the attrition rate to what Ralph Talcott Fisher has called "the dispiriting effect of the NEP."²⁸ This criticism posed a direct challenge to Bukharin, who, along with Lunacharskii, was largely responsible for NEP's implementation in culture.²⁹ Bukharin acknowledged before the Congress NEP's culpability in "the extraordinary demoralization among youth," citing "the 'growth of social contradictions'" (that is, ideological reversals and economic inequality) and, especially, "the contrast between the psychological atmosphere of the [NEP] and that of the Civil War."³⁰ He claimed that, "[o]n the one hand, [NEP] has a positive significance – that is, raising the working class's standard of living. But on the other hand, there is an entire row of negative phenomena, which justifiably elicit resentment and a psychological reaction."³¹

Bukharin's speech is steeped in psychological discourse, and his focus on the youth's presumably unconscious psychological needs seems to be at variance with traditional Marxist materialism; it is, however, in keeping with Bukharin's intellectual position in the early 1920s. As Stephen Cohen attests, although he opposed wholly "psychologized Marxism," he nevertheless "acknowledged the major importance of psychology, ideologies, morality, and customs."³² At times, the grafting of Marxist, psychological, and pedagogical discourses forced Bukharin into contradiction, as in this paradoxical statement cited by Fisher: "We must inculcate a completely instinctive [*sic*] attitude of impassioned hatred toward our class

RKSM, 11-19 oktiabria 1922 goda. Stenografizheskii otchet (Moscow-Leningrad: Molodaia gvardiia, 1927), pp. 373-74, 77-78].

28. Ralph Talcott Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959), p. 79, citing *Piatyi vserossiiskii s'ezd RKSM*, pp. 13-14, 18-20, 22. On the Kom-somol's confusion about and antipathy towards NEP, see also Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, ch. 4.

29. For Bukharin's key role in implementing NEP as a cultural policy, see A. Kemp-Welch, "'New Economic Policy in Culture' and Its Enemies," *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, no. 3 (July 1978): 449-65.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

31. Bukharin, "Kommunisticheskoe vospitanie molodezhi," p. 2.

32. Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 118, 111. For Bukharin's succinct summation of his thoughts on social psychology and the individual, see, for example, his *Teoriia istoricheskogo materializma: populiarnyi uchebnik marksistskoi sotsiologii* (Moscow and Petrograd: Gos. izd-vo, 1923), p. 207. For the juxtaposition of his notion of social psychology to "psychologized Marxism," see "K postanovke problem teorii istoricheskogo materializma (Beglye zametki) (1923)," in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, ed. G. L. Smirnov (Moscow: Politizdat, 1988), pp. 39-49.

enemy.”³³ To proclaim in a Marxist context that “young people are given more to feeling, than reasoning [*molodezhi svoistvenno bol'she chuvstvovat', chem rassuzhdat'*]” is to walk a fine line between nuance and heresy.³⁴ The fact that Bukharin’s 1922 speech puts an even greater emphasis on feelings than does his 1921 editorial testifies to his growing concern over the Party’s failure to attract and retain younger adherents. What other than unconsciously motivated feelings could explain the youth’s having “wavered [*drognula*]” (a reflexive, emotional reaction) at the superstructural manifestations of NEP’s “strategic maneuver,” which, after all, had improved their material well-being?³⁵ Implicit in Bukharin’s discussion of youth psychology is a rejection of the Trotskyist notion of the young as a “barometer” for Bolshevik policy-making and active contributor to it.³⁶ Bukharin had come to regard the young as a “barometer” for the effectiveness instead of Bolshevik propaganda. He had arrived at a paternalistic compromise: the young ought to be inveigled, but on their own terms. In this respect, the Komsomol was a crucial “focus group” for Bolshevik messaging.

Bukharin posited that, unlike the Civil War, NEP had failed to set a “vigorous, colorful, sharply defined, militant, heroic task” before youth. The Civil War had put forth a “colossal task of unprecedented beauty [which had] captivated them; their relations to it were unusually clear and obvious: they had to kill the common enemy – world capitalism.”³⁷ NEP offered a far less “captivating” goal: “What is heroic about fighting against concessionaries?”³⁸ NEP’s “trivial work of construction [*melkaia stroitel'naia rabota*]” had precipitated an “ideological crisis [*ideinyi krizis*]” among Communist youth and among youth in general.³⁹ Bukharin’s best hope for a demonstrable affirmation of the Bolshevik agenda lay with the “growing reserves,” yet they appeared to have summarily rejected the latest policy in that agenda a year after its implementation.

Considering these admissions, and the anxiously bourgeois-baiting tenor of the Congress, Bukharin’s prescription seems all the more daring-

33. *Piatyi vserossiiskii s'ezd RKSM*, p. 123, cited by Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, p. 82.

34. Bukharin, “Kommunisticheskoe vospitanie molodezhi,” p. 2.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Leon Trotsky, *The New Course and The Struggle for the New Course*, intro. Max Shachtman (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 24, quoted and discussed in Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 84-86.

37. *Piatyi vserossiiskii s'ezd RKSM*, pp. 113-14, cited by Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, pp. 79-80.

38. Bukharin, “Kommunisticheskoe vospitanie molodezhi,” p. 2.

39. *Ibid.*

ly unorthodox. It was nothing short of radical to suggest that young people demoralized by NEP's concessions to bourgeois capitalism could be won back with the help of a literature modeled on that most stereotypically bourgeois of genres, the Pinkerton. Bukharin proposed a thoroughly NEP solution (indeed, concession) to a problem stemming from the reality of NEP itself. The "heroic task" played out on the battlefields of the Civil War had "captivated" the young, but so had the "light, entertaining, interesting plot and unfolding of events" that defined the bourgeois Pinkertons.⁴⁰ By Bukharin's lights, the Party could not afford to excite the young with perpetual war (or, for that matter, revolution), but it could offer a "cultural war" – as well as a fictional surrogate that infused tried-and-true formulas with proper ideological content.⁴¹

Significantly, Bukharin first raised the "red Pinkerton" question on November 25, 1921, and reiterated it in October 1922 in the context of a vigorous debate over the proper models and sources for "proletarian culture" that centered around the governmentally unaffiliated and, according to many Bolsheviks, heretical movement known as the *Proletkult* (*Proletarian culturally-educational organizations* [*Proletarskie kul'tur-no-prosvetitel'nye organizatsii*]). The movement drew the ire of "traditional" Marxists like Lenin by "underscor[ing] the importance of culture" over that of the economic base and allying itself with "heretics" like Aleksandr Bogdanov.⁴² At the same time, the *Proletkult* alienated those who, like Lunacharskii, believed in cultural pluralism by "insist[ing] on the primacy of a new culture that would express the values and principles of the victorious working class" and completely do away with all vestiges of bourgeois cultural praxis.⁴³

The programmatically independent *Proletkult* posed more of a challenge to Bolshevik authority than its avowed class enemies, the bourgeoisie, by proposing a radical but undeniably Leftist alternative to the Party's policies. Bukharin's position on the *Proletkult* in 1921-22 – which came

40. *Ibid.*

41. Bukharin generally attempts to redirect the military "enthusiasm" of the young toward cultural work, which he couches in marshal metaphors; he concludes his speech by calling for a "cadre of excellent warriors [*bortsov*] on the field of a cultural war [*kul'turnaia bor'ba*], [who would] honorably carry the banner once carried by the older generation" [*ibid.*].

42. Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), p. xix. For more on the *Proletkult*, see Edward J. Brown, *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1953); A. V. Karpov, *Russkii proletkul't: ideologiia, estetika, praktika* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo SPbGUP, 2009); and Zenovia A. Sochor, *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988).

43. *Ibid.*

to a head in an equivocating *Pravda* editorial dated November 22, 1921⁴⁴ and a consequent theoretical debate with Lenin’s camp in 1922 – illuminates his call for “red Pinkertons.” John Biggart reports that although Bukharin was forced to distance himself from Bogdanov’s “‘culturalism’, political bankruptcy, and a Menshevism indistinguishable from that of Maslov and Plekhanov,” he nevertheless “expressed approval of the cultural activities of the Proletcult.”⁴⁵

One of the Party’s primary theoreticians once again walked a fine line. Like Lenin and Lunacharskii, he believed that the *Proletkult*’s extremist ambition to “‘conquer’ bourgeois culture in its entirety, without destroying it, is as impossible as ‘conquering’ the bourgeois state,” but he was also unwilling to support the “total assimilation” of the old at the expense of the new.⁴⁶ He refused to stand firmly on either side of the debate and argued instead for a moderate, evolutionary – and truly Hegelian – approach. According to him, “[s]ome of [bourgeois culture’s] constituent elements are assimilated [*usvaivaiutsia*] by the proletariat into its own ideology.”⁴⁷ This position mirrors and sheds light on his call to resuscitate the Pinkerton model. After all, as he claimed in 1921, one of the “constituent elements” of bourgeois culture was its proven ability “to cultivate the young,” and that element ought to be adapted for new purposes.⁴⁸

It is ironic, then, that the sternest opposition to *Mess-Mend* and “Red Pinkertonism” in general came from partisans of proletarian hegemony in culture, who, as Sheila Fitzpatrick puts it, “emerged in the first years of NEP as a product of postwar demobilization and Komsomol activism.”⁴⁹ Nikolaev demonstrates the extent to which the proletarian cultural ideologues’ criticism of “Red Pinkertonism” was a proxy war with the Serapions and, to some extent, with Bukharin himself.⁵⁰ Some of the strongest attacks stemmed from the pen of Grigorii Lelevich (1901-1945), a prominent member of the proletarian literary groups *On Guard* [*Na postu*], *October* [*Oktiabr’*], and, eventually, *VAPP/RAPP* – the (*All-*) *Russian Association of Proletarian Writers* [*(Vse)rossiiskaia assotsiatsiia*

44. Bukharin, “K s’ezdu Proletkul’ta,” *Pravda*, Nov. 22, 1921, p. 2.

45. John Biggart, “Bukharin and the Origin of the ‘Proletarian Culture’ Debate,” *Soviet Studies* 39, no. 2 (1987): 237.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 234, citing V. V. Gorbunov, “Kritika V. I. Leninym teorii Proletkul’ta ob otnoshenii k kul’turnomu nalediiu,” *Voprosy istorii KPSS* 5 (1968): 91.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Bukharin, “Podrastaiushchie rezervy,” p. 2.

49. Sheila Fitzpatrick, “The Soft Line on Culture and Its Enemies,” in *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992), p. 104.

50. Nikolaev, *Russkaia proza 1820-1930-kh godov*, pp. 142-45.

proletarskikh pisatelei].⁵¹ Lelevich and his ilk were unsatisfied with *Mess-Mend*'s insufficiently Marxist content. In his initial review, which set the tone for the rest of his commentary, Lelevich accused *Mess-Mend*'s anonymous author of one damning "absurdity [*nelepost*]" after another:

World fascism is depicted not as a weapon of capitalism, but as a bunch of inbred high-born princes and counts. In their battle with fascism, the workers are aided by an inveterate capitalist, the multi-millionaire Rockefeller, Sr. [. . .] [Mess-Mend] does not fight for power, does not aim to forcibly [*nasil'stvenno*] take control of the government in order to reorganize society, but simply aims to impel things produced by workers to serve the proletariat. The creator of this fantastic plan, Mick Thingsmaster, denounces force [*nasilie*] and prides himself on never having spilled a drop of blood! [. . .] Petrograd has not only restored its economy, but has achieved a fairytale-like technical upswing, outpacing even America, while the entire world is still ruled by capital.⁵²

Lelevich's enumeration of Shaginian's "three strikes" elucidates both the proletarian cultural critics' conception of Marxism – identification of fascism with capitalism, repression of non-proletarian cultural elements, and embrace of world revolution through violent tactics – and a growing sense that the Pinkerton genre cannot by its very (formal) nature serve Soviet purposes. By the time Shaginian's follow-up, *Lori Len, Metallist*, appeared in 1925, Lelevich, galled by the author's domestic and international success, was prepared to declare open warfare:

"*Mess-mendovshchina*," this anti-Revolutionary boulevard concoction [*striapnia*], is approaching threatening proportions. Having begun as an internal Soviet misfortune, it turns into a disaster of international magnitude. [. . .] No patches can turn "*messmendovshchina*" into Revolutionary literature! [. . .] It is time to wage a serious battle against "*mess-mendovshchina*."⁵³

51. See, for instance, Lelevich's reviews of Shaginian in *Oktiabr*' 2 (July-Aug. 1924): 204-05; *Oktiabr*' 8 (Aug. 1925): 157-58; and *Molodaia gvardiia* 2-3 (Febr.-March, 1925): 260. For other examples of "red Pinkerton" criticism in proletarian journals, see L. Fevral'skii's review of *Mess-Mend* in *Molodaia gvardiia* 5 (1924): 254, and F. Beliaev's review of Vsevolod Ivanov and Viktor Shkolvskii's *Iprit* in *Oktiabr*' 6 (June 1925): 161-62.

52. Lelevich, review of *Mess-Mend*, *Oktiabr*' 2 (July-Aug. 1924): 204-05.

53. Lelevich, review of *Lori Len*, *Oktiabr*' 8 (Aug. 1925): 157-58.

The olive branch Bukharin had extended to militant advocates of proletarian culture during the debates surrounding *Proletkult* and those arising in 1924-25 was not accepted. Although he was the "one member of the leadership to show any sympathy with the proletarian cause in culture,"⁵⁴ he stopped far short of the proletarian groups' demand for strong Party intervention in literary matters, drafting the famously tolerant Central Committee Resolution "On the Party's Policy in the Area of Literature" of June 18, 1925. The Resolution stated that the Party promoted "free competition" among literary groups and eschewed "adherence to any movement in the area of literary form."⁵⁵

Once again, although Bukharin expressed unqualified support for the growth and development of proletarian literature, he refused to dictate in matters of form.⁵⁶ Instead, the Resolution concludes by calling for the use of "all the technical achievements of the old artistry, [in order to] work out an appropriate form comprehensible to the millions."⁵⁷ This conclusion can be read as a general elaboration of Bukharin's call for "red Pinkertons" in 1921-22. In matters of culture, Bukharin seems to have embraced an evolutionary dialectical approach, in which sublation leaves open the possibility of preserving the best of what came before, rather than abolishing it completely. In essence, Bukharin's literary policy reflected his broader theoretical stance, presupposing that the young nation's chaotic literary system, with its multitude of competing forces, would gradually reach a new equilibrium through active competition and adaptation.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, this position could not have found favor with the radical proletarian left, whose attacks did great damage to the viability of "red Pinkertonism." As Malikova observes, by the end of the decade, even one-time defenders of the genre like Sergei Dinamov (1901-39)

54. Fitzpatrick, "The Soft Line on Culture and Its Enemies," p. 105.

55. "O politike partii v oblasti khudozhestvennoi literatury," *Pravda*, July 1, 1925, p. 6. For Bukharin's role in authoring the Resolution, see Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 205.

56. See James Francis Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 26-27, and Robert A. Maguire, *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920's* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 423-24.

57. "O politike partii," p. 6.

58. For Bukharin's cultural policy as an analogue to his other domestic policies, see Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, pp. 205-06. For his "theory of equilibrium," see Cohen, pp. 116-18; Donny Gluckstein, *The Tragedy of Bukharin* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), pp. 62-64; and Kenneth J. Tarbuck, *Bukharin's Theory of Equilibrium: A Defence of Historical Materialism* (London: Pluto Press, 1989).

were to conclude that the very form of *Pinkertonovshchina* and adventure literature as a whole were irredeemably bourgeois.⁵⁹

In his 1922 speech before the Komsomol Congress, Bukharin not only placed a greater emphasis on young people's feelings, but also underscored the need for new societal "norms and codes of conduct" – a new equilibrium of another sort. He did so, in Fisher's words, "[w]arily, as though sensing that his audience was hostile to the idea."⁶⁰ In Bukharin's view, those needs had not been met by 1922, and the problem had worsened considerably:

[D]uring the transitional period of the revolution, old bourgeois norms of morality were defeated in all realms: sexual morality, personal relations, minor rules of conduct, all sorts of ceremonies, rituals, etc. The revolution had smashed all this to smithereens [*vdryzg*]. At the same time, the revolution had not managed to develop its own norms and codes of conduct, and the young fell into a hole [. . .]. The result was a kind of temporary anarchy [. . .]. This anarchic state lasts to this day. And the young only jeer, laugh, seeing nothing from the older comrades. The result is chaos of a semi-nihilistic, mocking type and nothing more. Nothing can be built on this. [. . .] In particular, this situation has been complicated in connection with the element NEP has introduced into our public lives. That is, the total psychological state of our youth under the influence of the new, growing economic relations.⁶¹

Bukharin's injunction against "semi-nihilistic, mocking" chaos took particular aim at the use of alcohol and tobacco, as well as excessive sexual promiscuity, vices that had once amounted to revolutionary gestures. Whereas "walking around with four cigarettes at once and regarding anti-alcohol and anti-tobacco propaganda with disdain" had once been a marker of Party affiliation – disrupting "the discipline of the old order [. . .] the organization of the school [system], and [. . .] the organization of society as a whole" – what sense did this behavior make now, when a new social order was taking shape?⁶²

The target of Bukharin's remarks was a perceived behavioral pattern that would come to be called "hooliganism," fears of which sparked a na-

59. Malikova, "Kommunisticheskii Pinkerton," pp. 285-86.

60. Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, p. 81.

61. Bukharin, "Kommunisticheskoe vospitanie molodezhi," p. 2.

62. *Ibid.* See also Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, pp. 81-84, and Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 64-69.

tional hysteria in 1925-1927, but had their roots in the early years of NEP.⁶³ As Gorsuch explains, the “hooligan” was a symptom of the failure of the Bolshevik “acculturating agenda.”⁶⁴ She notes that “Hesitation and doubt were deeply troublesome to revolutionary moralists who demanded full (and optimistic) commitment. The hooligan appeared disturbingly purposeless – even worse in this way than the criminal.”⁶⁵

Bukharin’s call for a “red Pinkerton” was an attempt to recast the “acculturating agenda” by appealing to the hooligan’s established taste for *Pinkertonovshchina*.

Fittingly, the campaign against “hooliganism” went hand-in-hand with a campaign against so-called *Eseninism* (*Eseninshchina*). Gorsuch also observes that Sergei Esenin’s “decadent [*upadochnyi*]” verse offered a rallying point for “all those youth who did not feel a part of the new Soviet society, all those who did not understand the path of the revolution, but instead felt lost and anxious in the face of such monumental changes.”⁶⁶ In this context, Esenin’s 1923 poem “Cigarette Peddlers [*Papirosniki*],” which depicts urban *besprizorniki* escaping their plight by “por[ing] over Pinkerton/ Out loud over a beer [*Chitaiut Pinkertona/ Za kruzhekoi piva vslukh*],” is both a literary portrait of stereotypical *Eseninists* and a refraction of the Bolshevik *Kulturträger*’s greatest anxieties.⁶⁷ On the one hand, Esenin’s “[d]esperate little urchins [*(s)orvantsy otchainnye*],” bear all the earmarks of NEP’s disenchanting youth, corrupted by privations, disappointments, and the resurgent ills of capitalism. These “(jolly thieves [*(v)eselye vory*]” enjoy “an evil game” in “mournful streets [*ulitsy pechal’nye*],” partaking of the period’s iconic vices: cigarettes and beer. On the other hand, the poem’s chronotope is exceedingly difficult to de-

63. For an overview and analysis of the “hooliganism” epidemic, as well as references to a rich array of primary sources, see Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, ch. 8, and Joan Neuberger, “Stories of the Street: Hooliganism in the St. Petersburg Popular Press,” *Slavic Review* 48, no. 2 (1989): 177-94. Some of the key sources from the period are *Khuliganstvo i prestuplenie. Sbornik statei* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izd-vo Rabochii sud, 1927); Ia. Bulaiskii, *Khuliganstvo kak sotsial’no-patologicheskoe iavlenie* (Moscow-Leningrad: Molodaia gvardiia, 1927); E. K. Krasnushkin, G. M. Segal, and Ts. M. Feinberg, eds., *Khuliganstvo i ponozhovshchina* (Moscow: Izd-vo Moszravotdela, 1927); and V. N. Tolmacheva, ed., *Khuliganstvo i khuligany. Sbornik* (Moscow: Izd-vo Narodnogo Komissariata Vnutrennikh Del RSFSR, 1929).

64. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, p. 74.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-77.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 180, citing Mikhail Koriakov, “Eseninshchina i sovetskaia molodezh’,” *Vozrozhdenie* 15 (Paris, 1951). See also A. Lunacharskii, ed., *Upadochnoe nastroyenie sredi molodezhi. Eseninshchina* (Moscow: Izd-vo Kommunisticheskoi akademii, 1927).

67. Sergei Esenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Nauka-Golos, 1996), 4: 188-89. See Dralyuk, “‘As Many Street Cops as Corners’.”

termine. Is it set in 1923, 1914, or 1907? The effect of “timelessness” is particularly damning in the context of NEP when questions of economic and ideological regression to the pre-revolutionary era were a source of unbridled anxiety. Unaffected by ideology and post-1917 social reform, the peripheral world of the capital’s “urchins” belied the revolutionary promise of progress. The poem may be read as an indictment not only of NEP, but of the Soviet project as such.

In 1927, after Esenin’s death and the close of the “red Pinkerton” experiment, Bukharin published an editorial on *Eseninshchina* in *Pravda*.⁶⁸ Toeing the Party line, he maligned Esenin’s verse as distasteful, ideologically vapid, and demoralizing: “Ideologically, Esenin presents the most negative features of the Russian countryside and of the so-called ‘national character’: face-smashing [*mordoboi*], the greatest internal indiscipline, the deification of the most backward forms of social life in general.”⁶⁹ Yet even then, years after his initial call for appropriate youth-oriented reading and its ill-fated consequences, he refused to back down:

Why does Esenin captivate [*zakhvatyvaet*] the young? Why are there circles of “Esenin widows” among our youth? Why does the Komsomol member often hide a booklet of Esenin’s verses beneath [an issue of] *The Communist’s Companion*? Because we and our ideologues have not touched those strings [*alt.* struck those chords] within the young, which Sergei Esenin had touched – though in an essentially harmful way.⁷⁰

Bukharin once again blamed the failure to win over the young on a “discrepancy [*nozhnitsy*]’ between the demand of the masses and the quality of the supply”:

We serve surprisingly monotonous ideological food. I say this not in the sense that this food is prepared solely according to a communist recipe. This last fact is very good, and, generally speaking, the more of this kind of unity, the better. But the problem that even here we forget about the consumer’s interests: the consumer often gets boilerplate [*shtampovannye*] paragraphs and circulars, written

68. Bukharin, “Zlye zametki,” *Pravda*, Jan. 12, 1927, p. 2 [reprinted in his *Etiudy* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gos. tekhn.-teor. izd-vo, 1932); *Etiudy* (Moscow: Kniga, 1988); and *Voprosy literatury* 8 (1988)]. See also Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 238.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*

with such boring monotony that a person unaccustomed to them grows literally nauseous.⁷¹

Although he no longer called for Pinkerton-like narratives, he continued to clamor for diversity and variety at a time when the specter of Socialist Realist homogeneity already haunted the literary scene: “We cannot feed our youth with horse pills [*v loshadnykh dozakh*] of one and the same thing.”⁷²

At the heart of Esenin’s “Cigarette Peddlers” lies Nat Pinkerton, who provides the young troublemakers with an escape more intoxicating than beer – “Beer or not, they’re soused [*Oni bez piva – vdryzg*].” Bukharin’s almost contemporaneous call for a “red Pinkerton” demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of a key demographic. He did not need Esenin’s testimony (the poem was not published until after the poet’s suicide) to arrive at his solution, but the “cigarette peddlers” are precisely the kind of target he had in mind. It was useless to rail against alcohol, tobacco, and delinquency, unless the message was delivered in a palatable – not to say intoxicating and pathologically addictive – manner.

Theoretically, the “red Pinkerton” had tremendous potential. In practice, it proved much more problematic. As an archetypal cultural product of the NEP, the “red Pinkerton” was, in every sense, a compromised phenomenon. Bukharin’s suggestion that young people – and particularly the communist youth disenchanted by the NEP – could be won over by a hybrid, often ambiguously parodic genre which melded Soviet ideals with bourgeois literary norms was politically untenable, although there is evidence that *Pinkertonovshchina* of every kind continued to captivate young readers well into the 1930s.⁷³ Orthodox Soviet literary critics and the ideologues of proletarian culture could no more support this partial regression on the cultural front than the Left Opposition could support the socio-economic regression of the NEP itself. The inherently unstable “red Pinkerton” serves as a revealing cultural analogue of the socio-economic policy with which it was associated.

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71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*

73. See, for instance, Samuil Marshak’s citations from and analysis of an informal nation-wide “survey” of children’s reading from 1934, “Deti otvechali Gor’komu,” in *Sobranie sochinenii v vos’mi tomakh* (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo khudozh. lit-ry, 1970), 7: 312–41. Originally published in *God semnadsatyi: Al’mankh chetvertyi* (Moscow: Sovetskaya literatura, 1934), pp. 425–51, and, in an abridged form, in *Pravda*, May 18, 1934.